

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2006

The Honorable Rob Portman
Director
The Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Portman:

As you prepare the President's fiscal year (FY) 2008 budget request, we urge you to provide funding for the Collins-Feingold Dental Health Improvement Act (section 340G of the Public Health Service Act). The program is intended to strengthen the dental workforce in our nation's rural and underserved communities by providing grants to States to help them develop innovative dental workforce development programs specific to their individual needs. Congress appropriated \$2 million for the program in FY 2006, and the FY 2007 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education appropriations bill approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee includes an additional \$2 million for the program. We are writing to request that you include at least \$2 million for the program in the President's FY 2008 budget request.

While oral health in America has improved dramatically over the last 50 years, these improvements have not occurred evenly across all sectors of our population, particularly among low-income individuals and families. Too many Americans today lack access to dental care. While there are clinically proven techniques to prevent or delay the progression of dental health problems, an estimated 25 million Americans live in areas lacking adequate dental services. As a consequence, these effective treatment and prevention programs are not being implemented in many of our communities. Astoundingly, as many as eleven percent of our nation's rural population has never been to the dentist.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that our dental workforce is graying. More than 20 percent of dentists nationwide will retire in the next ten years, and the number of dental graduates by 2015 may not be enough to replace these retirees. As a consequence, many states are facing a serious shortage of dentists, particularly in rural areas.

The Collins-Feingold Dental Health Improvement Act authorized a new State grant program administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration at the Department of Health and Human Services that is designed to improve access to oral health services in rural and underserved areas. States can use these grants to fund a wide variety of programs. For example, they can use the funds for loan forgiveness and repayment programs for dentists practicing in underserved areas. They can also use the grant funds to establish or expand community or

October 31, 2006

Page 2

school-based dental facilities or to set up mobile or portable dental clinics. To assist in their recruitment and retention efforts, States can use the funds for placement and support of dental students, residents, and advanced dentistry trainees. Or, they can use the grant funds for continuing dental education, through distance-based education, and practice support through teledentistry.

This program will help make oral health care services more accessible in our nation's rural and underserved communities, and we therefore urge you to include at least \$2 million for this important program in your FY 2008 budget request.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Russ Feingold
United States Senator

SMC:phh